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ABSTRACT

Both Ireland and Canada are officially bilingual countries. There are similarities between the two countries and differences with regard to numbers of speakers and purposes for which speakers use Irish or French. Yet, a comparison of language policy in the two countries is possible, one which would focus on demographic, economic, social, cultural, political, and juridical aspects of language status. The demographic aspect reviews percentages of unilingual and bilingual French and English speakers in Canada and compares the situation with Ireland. The economics discussion focuses on employment opportunities and notes that the language of work is the one which achieves economic status. The social status of language indicates the importance of education in enhancing language status. For example, the cultural status of a language is dependent upon education, a situation clearly evident in Quebec where both French and English populations have had their own school systems including universities. With regard to the political aspect, linguistic territoriality provides political leverage to enact language policies. Finally, the juridical status of language depends on the decision of the state. In conclusion, a distinction is made between functional and symbolic bilingualism, and it is noted that language autonomy seems to depend on economic advantage. (AMH)

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LANGUAGE POLICY IN IRELAND AND CANADA

- A COMPARATIVE SURVEY

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Language in Ireland and Canada

With Irish as the official language and English as a national language, Ireland is officially a bilingual state and, as such, it is not alone. In Europe it shares this characteristic with other sovereign states like Switzerland, Belgium and Finland. And also with several bilingual countries in Asia, Africa, and America. Coming from the largest of these American bilingual countries, from Canada, I should like to share with you some of our experiences and findings in the area of official bilingualism and language policy.

Although both Ireland and Canada are bilingual countries there are some fundamental differences which preclude some of our findings from being directly applicable here in Ireland. To begin with, unlike Éire, Canada is a loose confederation of partly autonomous states, each holding exclusive jurisdiction over language policy as it relates to the most crucial language-related areas: education, local administration, media and the work world. Within each of these states, or provinces as they are still called, the application of a language policy may be restricted to one or more of the constituent counties or municipalities. Although an effort has been made over the past decade to entrench language rights in a patriated constitution not all provinces have the same language policy. Ontario is unilingual in English; Quebec is officially unilingual in French; and New Brunswick is officially bilingual in both English and French. The Federal Government, representing Canada as a whole, is also officially bilingual in these languages, but only for services under its direct jurisdiction: defence, finance, postal services, transport, and the like, including all the federal crown corporations.

In Ireland, although there are indeed regional divisions, like the Gaeltacht and the counties, none has the autonomy of a Canadian province. So, when talking about Irish language policy, we do not have to make the same sort of regional distinctions as we do when referring to the nature of Canadian bilingualism.

Although the bilingualism of both Canada and Ireland share a common language, English, the other language, Irish or French, as the case may be, is quite different one from the other in the relative number of speakers and the purposes for which they use each language. While French is an official language in some thirty six sovereign states, Irish is one of those ancient European tongues which for centuries has succeeded in surviving in a nation without a state and has faced the prospect of dying in a state without a nation. Because of this age-old struggle to preserve its national identity, Ireland has become a leader in the policy of linguistic irredentism. In a world which is returning to its ethnic and regional roots, speakers of other ancient but stateless tongues are looking to Ireland to supply the model for language revival.

A third difference is in language demography. Within the French-speaking state of Quebec, there is an area populated by some four million speakers of French who know no English and must consequently be served in French. In Ireland, on the other hand, few people, if any, are incapable of understanding English or of accepting services in that language. In one case we have the inevitable products of language contact; in the other, the effects of language maintenance. It is the difference between the bilingualism of necessity and the bilingualism of desire.

In Canada, the recognition of French as a national language has evolved from a need to preserve the unity of the country. Consequently, both Canada and Quebec have undertaken extensive survey research on the basis of which they were able to formulate their respective language policies. And the results of these surveys can now be compared with those completed in Ireland during the past decade. If there is a common conclusion in the results of all these surveys it is that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Good attitudes alone do not assure language maintenance. Motivation moves no mountains of linguistic inertia.

In Ireland, for example, the survey of the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research, with which I had the pleasure and honour to have been associated, after measuring the relationship between language attitude and language behaviour, found that all variable attitudes combined accounted for only 2% of the variation in language behaviour; whereas the ability to speak Irish accounted for 53%. Of course, there were other dependent factors such as the availability of occasions to speak the language, which was responsible for 10% of the variation. This would seem to imply that success in raising the level of competence in spoken Irish would be reflected in an increased use of the language in appropriate contexts. Canadian research bears this out, while stressing that the availability of occasions to use the language is crucial. In the Quebec survey the leading factor for language maintenance turned out to be the language of work. And on the strength of these findings the Quebec government enacted a language policy whereby French became the required working language in trade, industry, teaching and administration.

With these similarities in mind, what can a Canadian-Irish comparison yield? Applying one country's solutions to another country's problems is valid only in so far as the problems are the same. A country's successful solution for flood control, for example, is of little use to an area permanently devoid of water. It would be futile and indeed presumptuous to elaborate general or universal theories based on Canada's experience in the making of language policy. It might be useful, however, with reference to the Irish context, to explain why certain types of policies were possible in Canada, why others were not, why some promising policies failed and why others succeeded. The first policy question had to do with the burden of bilingualism.

In a bilingual state, who becomes bilingual? That often depends on whose language one has to learn. While low status speakers learn high status languages, high status speakers rarely learn low status languages. In Canada, more than 96% of English speakers know only that one language, while 30% of the French speakers also know English, which has the higher status in most of the country. But what does language status involve? We must, of course, make this clear before we can study how language status may be modified.

Status has many faces. But it mainly has to do with people; who they are, how many they are, what they own, where they live, what they do, and even how they look. And all this is associated with how they sound, that is, with the languages they use to communicate with others and among themselves.

The status of a language depends therefore on the number of people using it, their relative wealth, the importance of what they produce and its dependence on language, their social cohesiveness and the acceptance by others of their right to be different. In other words, the faces of language status are demographic, economic, social, cultural, political and juridical.

The demographic aspect

Number is basic. It is also relative. If the four million French speakers in Quebec were placed in Switzerland, they would have proportionately greater language status than they have within an Anglophone Ame[illegible] of some 250 million speakers of English.

For two centuries the superior birth rate of rural French Canadians has been a counter weight to the more intensive British immigration. By the mid-sixties this was no longer the case. Decreasing birth rates, non-French immigration and language contact have combined to lower the percentage of Canadians of French origin whose home language is also French but not everywhere. While outside Quebec there was indeed more language contact, bilingualism, intermarriage and proportionately less French; inside Quebec the use of Fre[illegible] began a slight but steady rise some time during the sixties.

It is true that the incidence of bilingualism (almost a third) is higher among people of French origin than it is among people of British origin (about a twentieth). But this is mostly true outside Quebec where most French speakers must work in English. It is less common inside Quebec where most French speakers are unilingual. Here two thirds of the French speaking job holders work in their home language, as do two thirds of those of British origin. The other third of both ethnic groups and more than a third of the other minorities work in both English and French, while the remaining two thirds of the other ethnic minorities work in either of these languages but twice as many in English, since most have attended school in that language. The new Quebec language policy of the seventies directed most of the schooling for these minorities towards French with the intention of reversing these trends, French colonization of Canada having virtually ceased, French immigration having become sporadic and selective, and the French Canadian birth rate having fallen so low, that the future demographic status of French in Canada has understandably become a matter of concern. If these trends continue, what does the future hold in store?

What has happened is that the linguistic distribution of Canada's population has tended towards greater and greater linguistic nucleation. With increased mobility and urbanization, French areas it seems have become more French, English areas more English, and bilingual areas more bilingual. At an increasing rate, unilingual English workers are moving into unilingual English areas. As a result of the rapid assimilation of French speakers in bilingual areas and the increasing accomodation by the English Canadians as reflected in the federal Official Languages Act, the bilingual belt is becoming more bilingual. French Canadians are moving more into French-speaking areas where there is greater status given to French unilingualism as reflected in Quebec's Official Language Act (1974). In Montreal for example, there has been within a decade (1961-71) an actual decrease (of 3.5 %) in the bilingualism of those whose mother tongue is French, adding to the already large segment of the population (43.2 %) who know no English. Among those whose mother tongue is not French there has been an increase in (French-English) bilingualism of 8 % during the same period, thus reducing the small percentage of the population (18 %) who know no French. About 6 % of the population of Montreal whose mother tongue is English now have French as their home language, while only 2 % of those of French mother tongue have English as the language of the home. Language choice of Montreal's large ethnic population, however, varies according to nationality. Although fully 80 % of the Italian population uses Italian at home, the remaining 20% is

split evenly between English and French as home languages. Germans and Jews, however, have opted mostly for English but not all the remainder have opted for French, this being the home language of about 10% of the Germans but of only 2% of Jewish group.

The French unilingual area of Canada has become more concentrated. About 99.2% of Canada's French unilinguals are now concentrated in a contiguous area which includes parts of Quebec, and parts of the Northeastern areas of New Brunswick and Ontario.

Language-wise, Canada's population can be divided into these three categories and they differ upon territorial and ethnic lines. Leading the monolingual group are the British, 94% of whom understand nothing but English; then come the French, 60% understanding no language but French, then the Italians, 16% of whom are monolingual in that language; all the other ethnic groups rating 2% monolingualism, or less, in the home language. Leading the bilingual population in official bilingualism are the French, more than 30% of whom understand French, then the others, some 2% of whom know both French and English. Finally there are the trilinguals, which include 20% of the Jews, 10% of the Italians, 5% of the Poles and a lesser percentage of the other minorities. These foreign-born populations who have retained their home language are mostly concentrated in the ethnic enclaves of large cities like Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. But they are numerically too small to have any claim to territorial status.

By contrast, Ireland, language-wise, has two groups: bilinguals, known as Irish speakers and unilinguals, who speak only English. The bilingual group can be further divided into those whose first or home language is Irish (some fifty thousand, concentrated mostly in the Gaeltacht) and a much larger group of speakers who have learned Irish in school, with varying degrees of success. To accomodate this bilingual population various government services are offered in Irish. In Canada, such bilingual services are offered in areas where a substantial percentage of the population speak the other language.

But what represents a substantial percentage? And once this is agreed upon, how many can be counted as falling within a particular ethnic category? This is the game of ethnic demography.

The uses of ethnic demography in obtaining language status brings to mind the story of the three drunks who were contemplating their last bottle of rare old Irish whiskey. One says, "Take it easy fellows, it's almost half empty". "Come on!", says the other, "it's more than half full". "No wonder", says the third, "it has obviously been watered down". Which half you look at may well depend on which side you're on. And this, in turn will affect your judgment on the authenticity of the contents. In some countries, like Finland, an official minority as low as 6% is accorded status. In Canada, also for no apparent reason, the lower limit has been set at 10%. The percentage, of course, is arbitrary. Yet, even within a group so designated, it is not always clear who is a percentage of what. All we can say is that the more speakers of another language who are concentrated in a single area, the easier it is to justify bilingual services.

In sum, the Canadian experience seems to demonstrate the importance of territorial unilingualism in achieving language status. Although bilingualism may better the status of the individual, it does not necessarily enhance the status of his languages.

The economic aspect

Unilingual territoriality, of course, is not enough to maintain language status. If people within the territory are utterly dependent for their livelihood on outsiders who do not understand their language the prestige of that language will be so affected. The traditional settlers in Canada's St. Lawrence heartland were largely self-sufficient, living on the land and off the land, which enabled them to raise some of the largest families on the continent. As good land became scarce, however, many of the descendants of these farming families had to find jobs in urban industries operated by people who knew no French. It is true that the largest of these industries were part of Anglo-Canadian or multinational enterprises which operated elsewhere, and exclusively, in English. Yet, part of the French-speaking industrial masses continued to operate in French as they had always done. As this segment of the population eventually gained enough power and influence to affect language policy, English began to recede as the usual language of work in some industries. The use of French as a working language eventually spread to all sectors of this basically rich economy which included agriculture, fisheries, light and heavy industry which produced everything from spacecraft to textiles in sufficient quantities to generate a flourishing international trade. But more importantly, this French-speaking area contained vast reserves of primary resources in energy (three quarters of the country's hydroelectric potential), industrial metals and minerals (three quarters of the world's asbestos), vast iron deposits, and extensive forests. Quebec economic indicators like employment, income and GNP have admittedly been somewhat lower than in the United States and the English-speaking provinces to the west; but they have been consistently higher than those of the Anglophone provinces to the east. There seems to be little doubt that this measure of economic independence has contributed indirectly to the prestige of French in Canada and directly to the dominance of French in Quebec. In Ireland, the effects of economics on Irish is a well-known story. All students of Irish history can detail the past expropriations of fertile lands, the great famine of the eighteen forties, the massive overseas migrations, and the depopulation of the Gaeltacht, all of which events contributed to the decline of Irish. By the middle of the last century only 8% of the population could claim to be unilingual in Irish, while 80% of the population knew no Irish at all.

The economic status of a language, however, is often confused with that of the bilinguals who speak it. For many years in Canada, Anglo-Canadians went out of their way to discover bilingual French-Canadians in the higher levels of business, industry, education, and government. Placed on boards of directors and in public relations posts, French-Canadian colonials became almost as ubiquitous as were their counterparts in Kentucky. Both in Canada and the United States, much is made of the fact that some people of ethnic origin are now achieving economic status equal to that of the top Anglos; they have become lawyers, doctors, businessmen and even millionaires. All very well but what does it prove? All may enjoy equal opportunity as individuals but not as members of any particular ethnic group. These individuals have succeeded, not because they were ethnics, but in spite of it. Yet, that seemed unfair. They should succeed because they are ethnics. So we established quotas. And we put in people with ethnic status. Then we are hit by that back-lash phenomenon redundantly known as "reverse discrimination". So what to do? Abolish quotas and establish standards - the main one being bilingualism, so that all may cash in on their knowledge of both languages? Fine for the minorities but what about the public? Are they still worried about not getting the best services available? That depends on what they think they know, as this little story will illustrate.

A few years ago in a federal national park in the Canadian West, a French-Canadian tourist was drowned, and he drowned in French, which was his right under the Official Languages Act. But he also went down within hailing distance of a life-guard whose duty it was to save him. This got into the papers and the local Francophone community was up in arms, claiming that had the lifeguard understood some French this would not have happened. Here was yet another example of government indifference to the rights of the official French language minority. At the inquest, testifying on his own behalf, the lifeguard was asked whether he understood what the drowning man was yelling. Perfectly well. "Then why didn't you jump in and save him?", asked the judge. "No use, I can't even swim". "You can't swim? Then how did you get the job in the first place?" "Well", said the lifeguard, "I was the only guy who qualified as bilingual".

Even when ethnic quotas are imposed and employers are obliged to offer equal employment opportunity, the fact remains that the minorities will probably have to work in the language of the majority. That is why so much emphasis has been placed in Quebec's language policy on the language of work. That is the language which achieves economic status.

The social aspect

Another type of language status is achieved through organisations which provide a measure of social solidarity. In Ireland, as in Canada, there have been such organizations for more than a century. Examples are the Irish Gaelic League and the Canadian Societé St-Jean-Baptiste. But in both countries some of these organizations are becoming redundant as more and more of their work is being taken over by the government. For example, in the field of language planning proper, the work of such old and well-established voluntary organizations has now been taken over by large government language bureaucracies like the French Language Board (with 325 full-time employees) which deals in language planning and the French Language Council (with some three dozen workers) which regulates language policy. But these bodies are still relatively small compared to the federal language bureaucracies where language workers may be counted in thousands.

In no field of social organization, however, is language more decisive than it is in the domain of education. It is through the schools that a language is transformed from a family vernacular to a vehicle for cultural, scientific and professional advancement. Any group which, in the course of this transformation, must switch to another language reduces to that extent the social status of its mother tongue.

The loss of Irish as a school language was a major blow to the status of the language. Especially in the education of the clergy with the centralization of clerical training at Maynooth in 1795. And the propagation of general education through teachers trained in the English-using system of normal schools inaugurated in 1831. If Irish has lost this status through the schools, it is now dependent on the schools to regain it, since only through schooling can any sizeable number of Irish speakers be added to the population.

The more any group is dependent on another language for such education, the less will its own language be able to claim this sort of status.

In Canada, this problem, as far as French is concerned, is known only outside Quebec. For Quebec has always had its own French language educational institutions. It has six French-language universities, including law schools, medical schools, technology institutes and other professional schools in which all the learning and teaching are done in French. It is true that many

of the textbooks are imported from France and that English texts are widely used as references, as indeed they are in France. Yet, in the field of education, Quebec has been almost as linguistically self-sufficient as France itself. And in the past decade intense and massive cultural and scientific exchange between the two countries has contributed to Quebec's language self-sufficiency in North America.

Outside Quebec, in Ontario, the Maritimes and the West, education in English has been the rule for all French-speaking minorities. In some areas, however, there had been a certain measure of bilingual schooling. Bilingual education for French Canadians outside Quebec has increased during the past decade; in areas where bilingual schooling was the rule, the trend has been to education in French. The Maritimes, for example, now have their own French language university and a French primary and secondary school system. Such developments are the reflection of the increase in the social status of French in Canada, and especially in Quebec.

The cultural aspect

Closely dependent on education is the cultural status of a language. Here there is a marked difference between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The Francophones in Quebec have become culturally self-sufficient in all fields: newspapers, magazines, cinema, media, library resources and other cultural services. Outside Quebec, the French-speaking population has been depended for such services on English language sources. Because of this, the federal government as a consequence of its language policy has attempted to equalize the availability of French cultural resources throughout the country. Francophones throughout the country are now served by two French national television and radio networks stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in addition to a number of regional networks.

Although France supplies an abundance of French films, records, books and magazines, most of the entertainment in Quebec is locally-produced. There is a flourishing film industry, a television industry, a lucrative record industry and several publishing houses. Locally-written books of all descriptions are produced, including an average of a hundred French Canadian novels a year permitting students in universities to take a bachelor's degree in Quebec literature. Most Anglo-Canadian universities outside Quebec now have created chairs in Quebec literature, but only after their cousins in Britain where, at the University of Birmingham, such a chair has been maintained for more than a quarter-century. It is an indication of cultural status of a language when outsiders will learn that language in order to enjoy the cultural products of its people.

This does not mean that there has been no cultural influence in the other direction. After long isolation from North America cultural patterns of behaviour and life in a rural parochial society dominated by the cultural values of traditional French catholicism, the French Canadians became an urban people absorbing many of the Anglo-American cultural patterns of life, behaviour and attitude. This has resulted in both an outer conflict and an inner contradiction.

This type of culture conflict is not unknown in Ireland the strength of whose culture in the past has, between the 9th and the 16th centuries, succeeded in acculturating all the invaders. Irish was the first European language, after Latin and Greek to become a vehicle for literature. But in the long run, as in the case of French in Quebec, the enormous cultural production in English has been irresistible. In the field of science alone, most of the world's learned journals, some hundred thousand, are published in English. Educated people

must read one or more of these journals in their respective fields. In so; e countries, therefore, to be educated is to be bilingual.

The political aspect

The traditional French family has collapsed in Quebec but not through exogamy. In the process, the individual has rather become more dependent on the state for the solution of his problems, even for the protection of his mother-tongue. Part of this change is attributable to the modifications in the role and influence of the Catholic church, especially in the period following Vatican II. In Quebec the state has vigorously taken over many of the functions formerly performed by the Church and its para-religious organizations. Welfare is now largely in the hands of the state which supplies free education, free medical care, employment insurance, no-fault auto coverage, and soon a guaranteed annual income. All this, in addition to linguistic and cultural autonomy. Social guarantees of this order, however, must rest on a certain measure of political autonomy.

Though Quebec has long preferred to look after itself, this preference has become more marked since the election of a separatist government committed to political, linguistic, and cultural, if not economic autonomy.

One of the first actions of the new government was indeed linguistic. It passed a revised Official Language Act making French, not English, the official language (Charter of the French Language, 26 August 1977).

The linguistic territoriality of Quebec also provides political leverage at the federal level. No single political party is able to control Canada without the support of the Quebec electorate.

In Ireland, territoriality and the political status of a sovereign state has permitted the enactment of language policies otherwise impossible. From the beginning of the Free State in 1937 to the Republic of 1949, when I had the privilege of observing the inauguration ceremonies opposite the General Post Office on O'Connell Street, there has been growing state support for Irish. This eventually permitted some large-scale planning such as that which resulted in the 1965 Report on the Restoration of Irish, with its 260 recommendations.

The juridical aspect

A completely sovereign state can give its national language whatever legal status it desires. Contrary to post-war Ireland, this has not been the case for French in Quebec.

The limited official status enjoyed by the French-speaking peoples of Canada has been achieved only after two centuries of struggle, based on the foundation of an uninterrupted sequence of legal precedents dating from the Articles of Capitulation of the French forces on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. Much of the history of Canada over the past two centuries has been the story of a struggle by the French-Canadians to make the Anglo-Canadians respect the terms of these constitutional and treaty obligations.

First, there was the fight for the use of French in the courts and in the legislature, then in official documents, then in the currency, then on the stamps. Each new concession, no matter how trivial, was the result of long and bitter infighting against a well-entrenched and often bigoted English-speaking bureaucracy. It took ten years of struggle, for example, to change the name of Canada's national airline from the unilingual Trans-Canada Airlines to the bilingual Air Canada.

Towards a bilingual policy

This brings us to the distinction between symbolic and functional bilingualism which is not unknown in Ireland. In some countries tolerance towards language minorities may be more pragmatic than legalistic. If foreign safety signs on aircraft might actually save lives, why not install them. Here is an example of functional bilingualism.

Symbolic bilingualism is something else. In Canada, for example, bilingual minorities have been fighting an unending battle for outward signs that their mother tongue is indeed an official language. This symbolic use of bilingualism takes many forms: street signs, advertising, bank notes, and the like - depending on whether the jurisdiction is municipal, provincial or federal. At the municipal level, for example, the French-Canadian citizens of Winnipeg, although they comprise only 6% of the population as against 26% for other unofficial minorities, have recently succeeded in winning over a majority of the city council to the idea of bilingual street names. The opposition had argued that, since everyone knew English such signs would be useless, in addition to being a waste ($3,000) of the taxpayers' money. Anyway, what help would it give anyone to read "Avenue Portage Avenue", or "Place Martin Place" or "Rue Kennedy St." where the untranslatable proper name is what one is looking for? But the hold-outs finally yielded to the argument: "If a few thousand bucks will keep a few thousand voters happy, what the hell! We've wasted more money on crazier projects".

What the well-meaning aldermen failed to understand, however, was the fact that these bilingual signs were no more useless than the flags fluttering over their buildings. The signs were symbols of status conveying the meaning that French was an official language. That message was what the official minority wanted to see and also to hear, again and again, like the wife who knows her husband loves her; but she wants to hear him say it. But official assurances depend on a certain amount of good will.

In retrospect, it seems that the great reserve of good will within Canada has enabled the language rights aspects of the policy to be respected most of the time (80% of the time, according to the final report of the First Commissioner of Official Languages). On the other hand, the behaviour modification aspect has largely been a failure. It has proved impossible to change the work language of thousands of Anglophones; and that of the bilinguals still operating in English, out of necessity or out of habit. This is because most public servants have been unilingual in English, a language which the minority who were French-speaking could all understand. To rectify this unilingual French language units were created in the federal administration; but in practice nearly all of them ended up in Quebec where the internal working language had long been French and external services traditionally bilingual. There was little success in making French a working language outside Quebec

If there is a lesson in this for Ireland, it is that it is extremely difficult to modify the language behaviour of people whose working language is also that of the home. It is somewhat less difficult to have bilinguals use one of their home languages at work.

Recent experience in the restructuring of Canadian federalism would also seem to indicate that few people are willing to sacrifice economic advantage for language autonomy. In fact, the contrary seems to be the case. It is when dependence on another language puts people at an economic disadvantage that language autonomy movements seem to flourish most. Today with the economy affecting English and French alike, Canadians seem to be giving more urgency to issues like the lowering of interest rates than they do to a

final settlement of the language question. The moral being that if a country cannot have the language policy it desires, it may well have to settle for the policy it can afford. Yet, in Ireland, the great sacrifice already made for a language that kept the light of learning and civilization burning throughout the Dark Ages of the Western World is a measure of the importance the Irish people have given to the survival of their ancient tongue. Anyone, anywhere who has studied the past can only wish what the people of Modern Ireland will succeed in keeping this flame very much alive.